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WHY ARE YOU A CHURCHMAN?

A DIALOGUE.

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WHY ARE YOU A CHURCHMAN?

A PLAIN QUESTION,

Answered

IN A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN

Mr. Fitz Adam and John Oakley.

[by Thomas Dowgill
Minister of Cheddar]

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PREFACE.

WE learn from St. Paul that "to approve things that are excellent" is a chriſtian duty. It is a duty too much neglected. Hence it ariſes, that although we have a pure and apoſtolical church eſtabliſhed in theſe kingdoms; many, on the one hand, remain members of it without becoming duly ſenſible of the great bleſſing and privilege which they enjoy: and on the other hand, many ſeparate from this church, from an ignorance of its excellence and authority; and thus fooliſhly deprive themſelves of thoſe

great advantages, which the wiſdom and goodneſs of God have therein provided for them. That the excellencies of our eſtabliſhed church may be underſtood by the reader of the following pages, is the ſimple object of their publication. That theſe excellencies may be thankfully and devoutly acknowledged by all who already underſtand them, as the fruit of the diſtinguiſhing favor of God towards this our nation, is a ſubject of earneſt and hearty prayer to

The reader's cordial well-wiſher,

CHEDDER, *Thomas Drewitt.*

February 26, 1800.

A

DIALOGUE

Between Mr. Fitz Adam and John Oakley.

John. DEAR Sir, I have found ſo much benefit from your advice and inſtruction on former occaſions, that I cannot help troubling you whenever I am in any difficulty: and I hope you will have the goodneſs to pardon the liberty that I take in ſo doing.

Mr. Fitz Adam. No more apologies, John; but come to the point.

John. Sir, I thank you. You muſt know, I was coming home laſt evening from market, and fell into company with a ſtranger, who was ſo civil and open in his talk, that I gladly entered

into converſation with him. He diſcourſed a great deal about the taxes and the times: and though, to be ſure, the taxes are a little heavy, and the times not ſo good as one could wiſh; yet I could not but think that he was for making both appear much more grievous than they are; and ſo I told him. However he went on talking about ſuch matters, till we came oppoſite the church-yard; and there he made a full ſtop; and turning round, he looked at the ſteeple, and then at the walls, and then at the weather-cock, and then at the great brown door, full of nails, you know Sir; and all the while, he put on ſuch a face, that, to my mind, he did not ſeem to be altogether pleaſed. I thought, from his countenance, that the building was not to his taſte; and expected that he would have pointed out ſome fault in the maſonry: but when he turned round to me, he began aſking me about our miniſter; and inquired if we had any meetings or tabernacles in our pariſh. I told him that our miniſter was a very diligent paſtor: and that as to meetings, we had one in our village; but that as I had never attended it, I could give him no account of it. He did not ſeem to be put into any better humour by this information: and after muttering

muttering ſome words that I could not underſtand, he concluded, by aſking me with a ſour look, what was my reaſon for being ſo partial to the church. I was going to tell him this in the beſt manner I could: but juſt then we came to a place where our roads divided; and as it was almoſt dark, and I could not ſtay to talk with him, I wiſhed him a good night, and made the beſt of my way home. Now, Sir, I have been thinking, that if I had ſtayed to talk with my companion about the excellence of our church, I ſhould have been ſomewhat at a loſs to do juſtice to ſo good a ſubject; and therefore I reſolved to come to you, to beg you will favour me with a plain account of the excellence of the eſtabliſhed church of our land, that I may be the better qualified to give to every man that aſketh me, the reaſon of my firm attachment to it.

Mr. Fitz Adam. You have made a requeſt, John, which I ſhall very readily comply with. So ſit down, and draw to the fire; and I will tell you, as clearly as I am able, *Why I am a churchman.*

In the firſt place, I prefer the church, becauſe it is the *eſtabliſhed* church. Now, though this is not the very chief reaſon of my regard for it, I

count it to be a very ſtrong, and very good one. It is true, that many people in theſe days would not allow this to be a ſound reaſon: on the contrary, every thing that is eſtabliſhed, whether it be in church-matters or ſtate-matters, they for that very reaſon diſlike, and endeavour to overturn. They are never ſatisfied unleſs they are making new experiments: and they would rather follow the guiding of one of their own ſudden whims and fancies, than any of the wiſe maxims and regulations which their forefathers took ſo much care and trouble to eſtabliſh. If any thing is out of the uſual order and contrary to general cuſtom, they ſtraightway follow it: and I am convinced, that there are a great many people ſo fooliſh and thoughtleſs, that if the goſpel was preached ever ſo faithfully *in* the church, and the moſt arrant nonſenſe was held forth *out of it*, they would leave the church, and run after nonſenſe itſelf, in order to indulge their fondneſs for novelty and irregularity.

John. What you ſay, Sir, I am afraid is too true: and certainly it ſhould be no ſmall recommendation of our church, to conſider, that it is regularly ſettled and eſtabliſhed by the laws of our country.

Mr. Fitz Adam.

Mr. Fitz Adam. My ſecond reaſon for continuing a member of the eſtabliſhed church, proceeds from conſidering the many miſchiefs that uſually ariſe from perſons being guilty of ſeparation from it. People that are acquainted with hiſtory, can tell you what injuries were done to the cauſe of chriſtianity, in former times, by diviſions and parties among thoſe who profeſſed the Goſpel. But, unhappily, there is no occaſion for us to look back to paſt times for proofs of what I now declare; as we need only examine into what now paſſes in our own days, to be convinced, that ſeparation from the communion of the church expoſes our country to diſcords, quarrels, and diſputes; which not only diſturb the peace of ſociety, but alſo fatally prevent the growth of that charity and good-will, which it is one of the grand aims of the goſpel to promote. When men begin to depart from ſettled rules, and to quarrel with eſtabliſhed authorities, there is no gueſſing where they may end. Thus, in our own days, we have ſeen that many of thoſe who ſeparated from the church, have ſince been divided among themſelves, and formed into parties as much or more at variance with each other, than

either of them were with the church from which they ſeparated.

John. So I have heard, Sir. One of my kinſmen was among the number of thoſe that formed themſelves into a ſeparate ſociety, at the firſt outſet of the buſineſs: but he ſoon found cauſe to quit them: and he has often told me, that he can declare from experience, that the communion of the church is beyond all compariſon the moſt favorable to the preſervation of peace and mutual charity.

Mr. Fitz Adam. I am well aſſured, John, that he is in the right. But I muſt not forget to tell you, that the danger proceeding from people ſeparating from the church, is greater in theſe times, than it ever was before. We all know, John, that the wicked ſupporters of French principles are always on the look out, for people whom they may convert to their plans of ſedition and tumult. Now, they have been labouring very buſily among the diſſenters from the church, in expectation of making ſome friends among them. I am afraid they have too often been ſucceſsful. When men have ſet themſelves againſt the church, they are thereby prepared to liſten to thoſe that endeavour to ſet them againſt the ſtate.

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It is a certain truth, John, that numbers of ignorant people, by leaving the church, have fallen into the company and connexions of theſe Jacobins; and at laſt become tools in their wicked hands of ſtirring up rebellion, and ſtriving to accompliſh dear old England's downfall.

John. There is indeed too much truth in what you have ſaid, Sir. I myſelf could point out four or five among my former acquaintance, that have fallen into this ſnare. One of them, whom I dare ſay you have heard people talk of, is now in Dorcheſter jail.

Mr. Fitz Adam. So I have been told. But there is another evil that very commonly proceeds from men ſetting up for themſelves ſeparate congregations, and that is, *Falſe Doctrines.* It has happened almoſt univerſally, that ſchiſm has proved the parent of hereſy: and that every ſect that has ſeparated from the church, has fallen into ſome groſs miſtakes in matters of faith. It would aſtoniſh and ſhock you, to hear of the fooliſh and blaſphemous notions that ſome of theſe ſects maintain. I aſſure you that every day I live, I diſcover more reaſon to bleſs God for raiſing up in this nation an eſtabliſhed church, in which the pure and ſimple doctrines of ſcripture are preſerv-

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ed from being mixed with the wild and presumptuous fancies of self-conceited and half-learned men. But there remains one circumstance concerning separation from the church, which I have not yet spoken of, and which is of great importance; I mean the *sinfulness* of such separation. Now, as this is an affair between every man's conscience and his God, I should be sorry to advance any thing on this head either hasty or uncharitable. But Scripture authorizes me to declare, that every person who separates himself, or causes others to separate from the established church, is guilty of the sin of schism. And when we remember, that by causing this schism or division, a man disturbs the peace of the christian community, opens the way for seditions and heresies, and disobeys the command of the apostle of our Lord, who directs "that there should be no schism in the body;" I say, when we remember all this, we shall do well to be on our guard, lest we bring guilt upon our souls, by lightly separating ourselves from the communion of the lawful and established church.

John. Indeed, Sir, it seems to me, that instead of leaving the church upon trifling and vain pretences, as too many do; a man should make

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it a matter of conſcience, to reſiſt all temptation to ſuch diviſions.

Mr. Fitz Adam. Surely: and therefore what I have now declared to you on this ſubject, conſtitutes my ſecond reaſon *Why I am a churchman.* The next excellence of our church, for which I moſt decidedly eſteem and prefer it, is, the agreement of its form, ceremonies and government with the uſage and direction of the apoſtles. As far as we can learn from revelation or hiſtory of the diſcipline and regulations of the chriſtian church in the earlieſt and pureſt ages of it, our national church appears to be framed according to the original apoſtolic model. Moreover, the miniſters of our church are ordained to their holy office according to the appointment of Chriſt himſelf; and lawfully authoriſed to officiate in the ſanctuary, and to act as the true and undoubted ambaſſadors of the Lord Jeſus.

John. Surely Sir, that cannot be queſtioned. But ſuffer me to inquire, what we ought to ſay to thoſe, who excuſe their ſetting up ſeparate congregations, by affirming, that there are ſome among the regular clergy, that do not faithfully perform their office, nor lead lives quite ſuitable to it.

Mr. Fitz Adam.

Mr. Fitz Adam. What ought you to ſay, John? Why, that you wiſh them a little common ſenſe, to prevent them from juſtifying their diſſenſion by ſuch a miſerable excuſe. Suppoſe, John, that you and I ſhould be told, that in the Parliament-houſe there were four or five unworthy members, that did not attend to their duty, nor act in a manner becoming their ſituation: and, ſuppoſe, upon hearing this, we were to determine not to remain any longer ſubject to the Parliament of Great Britain, but reſolved to ſet up a Parliament for ourſelves in our village, in oppoſition to the eſtabliſhed one of the land: what could we ſay for ourſelves?

John. I can hardly tell, Sir: but I fancy our very beſt friends would ſuſpect us of being fools; and every body elſe (begging your honour's pardon) would ſet us down for a couple of rogues.

Mr. Fitz Adam. And truly, I don't think that we could complain of their being uncharitable in ſo doing. I put this caſe to you, to ſhow how abſurdly and perverſely they argue, who affirm that the faults of a few of the eſtabliſhed clergy furniſh a good cauſe for deſerting the church of which they are miniſters; and ſetting up ſeparate places and ſocieties for public worſhip, to the ſad

interruption

interruption of peace, good order, and chriſtian unity. Every miniſter is, like Elias, "a man, ſubject to like paſſions as we are:" and if we would ſhew a true chriſtian ſpirit; inſtead of following the example of thoſe, who heap malicious abuſe upon the whole body of the clergy, becauſe ſome few among them may not be ſo upright and diligent as they ought to be; let us devoutly thank the Lord that ſo many of them are faithful and active in their ſtation, bleſſings to their flocks, and edifying examples of piety and holineſs. It has given me much ſorrow to obſerve that many of the diſſenting teachers (whoſe motives I once eſteemed good, however irregular their practices) have of late employed a conſiderable part of ſome of their public diſcourſes in ſetting forth moſt vulgar, uncharitable, and truly unchriſtian abuſe againſt the eſtabliſhed clergy. If they call this *preaching Chriſt*, I can only ſay that I rejoice that I have not ſo *learned* him. I hope my friend, you now underſtand my thoughts on this queſtion which you have propoſed: and I am perſuaded that you, and every honeſt man muſt agree with me in concluding, that if a man refuſes to become a member of any church, unleſs its miniſters are *all* poſſeſſed of *ſinleſs perfection*; he muſt ſeek his church

church in ſome other world; unleſs he has the preſumption to expect that God ſhould work a miracle, in order to accommodate ſuch a man's unreaſonable ſcruples.

John. What you have ſaid, Sir, reminds me of an obſervation that has often come into my mind, concerning the mildneſs and forbearance which appear in the laws of our church and in the general behaviour of its miniſters, towards thoſe that ſeparate themſelves from it: even though theſe very ſeparatiſts are ſo violent againſt the church.

Mr. Fitz Adam. What you have now mentioned, John, ſhould be ſet down as another reaſon *Why I am a churchman:* for, among the excellencies that diſtinguiſh the church of England above any other, I moſt cordially eſteem that mild, unperſecuting, and generous ſpirit, which is diſplayed in the laws, uſage, and cuſtoms of our church towards thoſe that are ſeduced to deſert its communion. I own this truly chriſtian quality endears the church ſo much to my heart, that I ſhould indulge myſelf in dwelling longer upon it, was it not that I am impatient to lay before you my *chief* and *grand* reaſon *Why I am a churchman.* It is this. I am convinced

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and aſſured, that our church is, in an eminent degree, " the pillar and ground of the truth." Its eſtabliſhment has long been the glorious bulwark, whereby, under God, the pure worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt, the truths of his goſpel, and the right adminiſtration of his holy ſacraments, have been defended from the attacks of unbelieving and ungodly men. In the articles, homilies, and public ſervices of our church, the important and eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity are ſet forth and maintained with the utmoſt clearneſs and propriety. Such as the total corruption of our nature by original ſin; the juſtification of believers by the ſole merits of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; the unity of the ever-glorious Trinity, and the conſequent divinity of the Son and the Holy Ghoſt; the abſolute neceſſity of regeneration of heart to ſalvation; and the entire agency of the Holy Spirit in effecting this and every ſubſequent grace in the ſanctification of believers: all theſe grand truths are ſet forth ſo plainly, and maintained ſo wiſely and forcibly by our church, that her ſons can never be at a loſs for inſtruction in theſe doctrines, and her enemies are prevented from overturning them. The form of public worſhip, which the church has ordained, is, I believe, the

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moſt correct and becoming that the wiſdom of man can contrive. The prayers that are appointed to be uſed are highly ſpiritual, and beautifully ſimple. They are ſuch as the heart and lips of every real chriſtian may, and ought to addreſs to the throne of grace. And, indeed, when we conſider how much goſpel-truth is interwoven and continually brought before us in the ſervices of our church, and alſo that conſiderable portions of ſcripture are rehearſed by the miniſter every ſabbath, we may confidently ſay, that even if there was no *preaching* in our church, an attentive conſideration of what is ſpoken in the reading-deſk, would furniſh any man with the means of becoming acquainted with all the doctrines of the goſpel, and thereby of being made wiſe unto ſalvation.

You are now, I truſt, enabled to form a clear notion of the excellence, purity, and authority of our church. And when you are again called upon to declare *Why you are a churchman*; I truſt you will not forget to ſet forth theſe ſtrong and all-ſufficient reaſons:

Firſt. That the church is eſtabliſhed by the laws of your country.

Secondly. That ſeparation from it is certainly dangerous

dangerous to the peace of ſociety; deſtructive of the unity of the brotherhood; often productive of hereſies and falſe doctrine; and contrary to the law and ſpirit of the goſpel.

Thirdly. That the church is in all eſſential points conformable to the uſage and directions of the holy apoſtles.

Fourthly. That its miniſters are duly educated and lawfully appointed to their high and holy office.

Fifthly. That the church is eminently diſtinguiſhed by the truly chriſtian ornament of a mild, unperſecuting, liberal ſpirit,———and

Laſtly, That it provides in the beſt manner for the pure and ſpiritual worſhip of Chriſt; the preaching of his word, and the adminiſtration of his ſacraments. And by the ſoundneſs of its doctrines, the ſpirituality and ſimplicity of its public ſervices, and the conſtant rehearſal of the ſcriptures, makes the wiſeſt and moſt effectual proviſion for training up its ſons in the exerciſe of thoſe means of grace, whereby they may, through the bleſſing of the Holy Spirit, lay hold upon the hope of eternal glory.

And now, when all this is conſidered, it muſt doubtleſs be the ſecond wiſh of your heart, to be a ſound

a ſound churchman. I ſay the *ſecond* wiſh of your heart; for the *firſt wiſh* muſt ſurely be this, —that you may be *a true chriſtian*. Our being members of the church does not of itſelf neceſſarily make us faithful or holy: it only furniſhes us with the beſt means and opportunities of becoming ſo. It is not enough for us that we mingle in the congregation where ſpiritual worſhip is maintained; we muſt ourſelves ſpiritually join in this worſhip, or it will not benefit us. It is a great bleſſing to have the privilege which we poſſeſs, of frequenting the ordinances of ſuch a pure and apoſtolical church: but remember, unleſs we uſe thoſe ordinances ſincerely and devoutly, and unleſs they contribute to make us more humble and pious, more ſober and watchful, more active in promoting the glory of God, and more diligent in advancing the welfare of our fellow-creatures; we ſhall have the guilt of having abuſed the greateſt privileges, and neglected the moſt favourable opportunities: and wretched and awful in the extreme will be the caſe of all thoſe, who have only a form of godlineſs, denying the power thereof; and put on the name and profeſſion of chriſtians, while they retain the tempers and lead the lives of heathens. May the Lord in

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his mercy defend us from this ſtate of hypocriſy and iniquity : and before we part, let us bend before the throne of grace, in humble and hearty acknowledgment of the goodneſs of God in raiſing up ſuch a glorious viſible church here upon earth : and beſeeching him that he will perpetuate this his ineſtimable gift ; and render us ſuch true ſpiritual members of his church militant here below, that we may hereafter join the church triumphant above, to laud and magnify his holy name, and ſing his praiſe for ever.

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